

**Opening Remarks of the Honorable Robert J. Wittman**  
**for the**  
**Seapower and Projection Forces and Readiness Joint Hearing on**  
**State of the Surface Navy**  
**March 3, 2022**

I want to thank Chairman Courtney for yielding and especially thank Chairman Garamendi and Ranking Member Waltz for participating in this detailed review of our surface navy posture.

My friends, Great Power Competition is already here and we're currently not setup to prevail. With President Biden's inept withdrawal from Afghanistan, Putin's invasion of Ukraine and Xi's continued Chinese expansion both in terms of military size and political will, we have arrived at a new period of international instability. Our desire to maintain strategic advantage and tactical overmatch is being challenged. A change in our national security strategy is solely needed that prioritizes warfighting IN the near term.

Yet, as I look at the Department of Defense's priorities of tackling COVID, building diversity and elevating climate change as a "national priority", our warfighting focus appears to be particularly askew.

Even the Navy continues to advocate for a divest to invest strategy that, at its core, presumes that maritime conflict will not occur this decade. I categorically reject this notion. I ascribe to the warnings of our PACOM

commanders who believe that conflict will likely occur in the near term.

To accomplish this reality, we need to adjust our strategic priorities to ensure that our nation is not ready to support Battle Force 2045 but rather ready to support a conflict now.

The lack of urgency in national security planning is particularly disheartening. Last year, the Navy requested only one destroyer, no amphibs and proposed to retire 7 large surface combatants whose firepower exceeded that of the entire British Navy. The Navy provided a “30 year shipbuilding plan” that was only good for one year. The Navy submitted a shipyard recapitalization plan with little financial backing. And the Navy continues to underman our surface Navy who currently is lacking over 5,000 sailors.

While I am glad that Congress rebuffed a series of Navy proposals last year, this lack of national security planning unsettles our allies and unnerves the industrial base that craves real leadership. Our Navy needs to wake up and change their calculus to support our new strategic reality.

I remain committed toward providing a surface navy that meet the combatant commander's requirements. While I am pleased about the flight III destroyer with a new radar and the new multi mission Frigate, I am concerned that the CNO's stretch goal of deploying large unmanned surface vessels alongside an aircraft carrier in the next 5 years is premature. And, I am particularly troubled about purported amphibious ship reductions. Commandant Berger's vision should be fully embraced and resourced.

As to surface navy culture, I want to thank our witnesses for supporting an independent review of a new surface warfare officer career path and training alternatives that align with the merchant marine. Additionally, I am pleased that we specifically included an assessment in last year's defense bill to specifically review female retention rates. I think all of these assessments are essential for a more effective surface warfare culture.

In closing, I am reminded of one of my favorite Navy quotes by George Washington, "It follows then as certain as that night succeeds the day, that without a decisive naval force we can do nothing definitive, and with it,

everything honorable and glorious.” It is time that we relearn the lessons of our past.

Again, I appreciate Chairman Courtney, Chairman Garamendi, and Ranking Member Waltz’s support for having this important hearing and I yield back the balance of my time.